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ABSTRACT

Agency coordination and cooperation is necessary to establish quality educational programs in rural areas. An example of rural agency cooperation in Tennessee involves business and industry, church, vocational center, community college, United Way, and state and federal agencies in administering, equipping, staffing, and funding a child care and development center. The Children's Center--a comprehensive child care center opened in 1985--currently serves 62 children ages 2-6, and also has an after-school program for kindergarten children. Preschool children receive care, developmental and psychological assessment, social services, speech and hearing testing and therapy, and medical referrals. Students at a local vocational center serve as aides in a cooperative education/work experience program and may enroll in a program to earn college credits at a nearby community college. (LFL)

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UNITING SCHOOL, COMMUNITY, INDUSTRY, AND PUBLIC AGENCIES IN THE RURAL COMMUNITY

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UNITING SCHOOL, COMMUNITY, INDUSTRY, AND PUBLIC AGENCIES IN THE RURAL COMMUNITY

America--a land of commerce and industry; a land of abundance that has unleashed the resources to create an unprecedented wealth of goods and services; an affluent, capitalistic society that allows freedom of choice in the pursuit of occupations and careers; yet a country in which it is now becoming very difficult for some individuals to earn a living.

Whole careers that many workers have built with years of training and experience are becoming obsolete, not as a result of merely cyclical changes, but as a consequence of rapid and incessant change in the structure and technological base of what we now refer to as a global economy.

Because of these modern technological changes, there is a need to very carefully assess what we are educating people for and the methods we are going to use to do it. The way we deploy our resources to educate our work force will, as never before, affect our productivity, our economy, and the quality of life of our citizens.

Labor statistics make it clear that there is a very real and pressing need for quality rural education. The study of the basics, as well as literature and history, have definite value, but a well-rounded educational program today must not fail to include courses in job-related skills such as computer science, laboratory techniques, electronics, and other technical skills. It is very apparent that many of our unemployed or underemployed college graduates are becoming painfully aware of this fact. As a society we must hold high the objective of "education for the whole person," but if

the "whole person" can't get a job, and thus create a livelihood for himself, it seems pointless to talk about enriching his life.

It is easily understood that it would be difficult for any one agency to deliver all the services needed in this technological society. Therefore, "linkage" of agencies seems to be the answer in fulfilling these requirements, especially in the rural community.

"Linkage" is a very important aspect of rural education. Community agencies and programs including the Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Board, and the County Government are linked and coordinated to make rural education more effective. The local education agencies coordinate efforts with state agencies, federal agencies, key resource people, and area business and industry in intake, placement, and evaluation of the program.

For the industrial firm considering the location of a new plant or for an existing industry considering expansion, a supply of trained workers is a must. Rural communities must develop and provide a diversified educational system that develops qualified, reliable, professional, and skilled workers. The Greeneville-Greene County Vocational Center, Holston United Methodist Home for Children, United Way, the Tennessee Department of Human Services, and area business and industry combine to produce a trained and dependable labor force and a needed community service.

The following segments will illustrate how the linkage of various agencies in the rural community can result in educational excellence as well as provide needed child care services.

Women in the work force has increased by almost 60% since the 1970's. Nearly one-half of all mothers of children under six years old either work or are looking for work.

Working parents continue to list "child care" as the single most important problem they face. Availability of quality care is a problem, especially for parents of infants and toddlers. If working parents are not satisfied with their child care arrangement, the resulting distraction, stress and anxiety, decrease productivity and increase tardiness, absenteeism, accidents, and employee morale problems.

Quality child care is expensive. Costs range widely across the country and from urban to rural areas. (Currently, costs range from $45.00 a week in the southeast to $126.00 per week for infant care in the north.) Must of what is available is priced beyond what most parents can afford. It is estimated that working parents of preschool children spend 1/4 of their net income for child care services.

The child care program's advisory committee began exploring the possibility of opening a child care center in an effort to meet the demand for quality child care for the working parents of Greene County and to provide appropriate occupational experiences for child care students enrolled at the Greeneville-Greene County Vocational Center. A needs assessment verified the advisory committee's original supposition--there was limited child care service available for working parents and much of the available child care was sub-standard.

Business and industry leaders were dramatically aware of the need for quality child care for their employees. Studies indicate that industry supported child care yields dramatic benefits not only for the employee, but for the industry as well. Business and industry involved in child care services have noted an increase in employee productivity, job satisfaction, and greater company loyalty. There is a marked reduction in absenteeism, tardiness, and training costs. Employees experience reduced anxiety with

child care services and tend to have better job performance. Employees realize financial benefits from part or total funding by business and industry.

The Children's Center, a comprehensive child care center, opened April 7, 1985 and is currently serving 62 children ages 2-6 years of age. There is also an after-school program for kindergarten children. In addition to normal child care services, the center provides developmental and psychological assessment and counseling for the children enrolled. The center also offers social services, speech and hearing testing and therapy, and medical referrals as needed. As a participant in the USDA child care food program, the center receives reimbursement for free and reduced price meals served to eligible children.

The Children's Center is governed by a Board of Directors whose duties include the establishment of policies for the center's operation and hears grievances from program participants. The Board of Directors consist of a representative from each sponsoring agency, early childhood education specialists, pediatric health care professionals, and a parent representative. The child care instructor serves as chairperson of the advisory committee.

Staff consists of a director, secretary, and five teachers, all of whom are certified in early childhood education. In addition, students from the Child Care program serve as aides at the center through the cooperative education/work experience program. Fees are based on the parents ability to pay, utilizing a sliding fee scale.

Funding and additional support for the center comes from the following agencies and business and industry:

Holston United Methodist Home for Children serves as the fiscal agent for the center and handles all administrative and personnel functions.

The Children's Center is housed in a building owned and maintained by Holston Home, which is centrally located near the county's business and industrial district.

Equipment and furnishings for the center were provided by the Vocational Center's Child Care Program. By being involved at every level of the center's operation, child care students receive valuable and realistic "on-the-job" training in a quality setting. The Child Care students also have an opportunity to enroll in the 2+2 program offered in cooperation with Walters State Community College. The 2+2 program allows high school students to earn college credit while in high school and thereby shorten the time and money required to earn an Associate Degree.

United Way of Greene County provides $16,000 annually to the center to offset the reduced fees offered to low income families in order that they may also have access to quality child care services.

Local businesses and industry providing support to the center include The Austin Company, Southern Packaging, and Metals Engineering Corporation.

The Children's Center is eligible to receive $59,300 from the Tennessee Department of Human Services. Title XX funds are provided for the care of children in protective services and for income eligible parents who are working or training to become employed. The goal of Title XX funding is to assist families in becoming self-sufficient and able to function without public assistance.